

## EIGHT

# INVISIBLE AGENTS OF EASTERN TRADE: FOREGROUNDING ISLAND SOUTHEAST ASIAN AGENCY IN PRE-MODERN GLOBALISATION

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### INTRODUCTION

Maritime Southeast Asia offers a fascinating paradox for scholars interested in the emergence and development of a more connected and ‘globalised’ world over the course of the last two millennia. The region’s products have flowed through, and indeed often been absolutely central to, networks of global commerce for several thousand years. As the major source of commodities for the world’s spice trade, Maritime Southeast Asia has enchanted and enticed sailors, merchants and kings from the far corners of the known world, spurring voyages of exploration, acquisition and exploitation for over a thousand years. Insular Southeast Asia is famous not only for its spices and other forest and marine commodities though, but also for the maritime skills of its inhabitants. Austronesian languages are spoken in Maritime Southeast Asia but also throughout the Pacific and as far west as Madagascar – indeed the Austronesian language family was the most widely distributed of any linguistic family in pre-colonial times, established across a watery world where it was carried by some of the most skilled sailors of the pre-modern global stage. Southeast Asians are accordingly suggested to have played an important role not only in procuring commodities for the pre-modern marketplace, but also in mobilising and transporting them, carrying them across and between islands, and even out into the wider world.

Despite the extraordinary importance of Maritime Southeast Asia in shaping patterns of early global maritime trade, however, Southeast Asians feature minimally in most accounts of ancient commerce and Indian Ocean trade. Particularly invisible are the smaller-scale societies largely responsible for the initial acquisition and mobilisation of the region's spices, forest products and marine goods. But even the involvement of Maritime Southeast Asian polities in emerging and developing trade axes from the early first millennium CE is treated problematically, and the role of Southeast Asian travelling merchants and sailors broadly overlooked. Partly this is an empirical issue – historical sources are minimal, archaeological survey and excavation are in their infancy in many relevant areas, and there are issues of preservation that impact the recovery of the remains of tropical societies with a predominantly wood-built architectural tradition, not to mention their more mobile elements. Yet these limitations are only part of the story, and equally if not more responsible for a lack of attention to Southeast Asian agency have been the scholarly paradigms that have guided research. These have often imposed Western notions of statehood as implicitly centralised, agrarian and 'solid' – prototypical states manifest in concentrated and dense settlements with permanent and monumental architecture that materialises the siphoning off of excess agricultural production (cf. Steward 1955; Wittfogel 1955; also Service 1978; Claessen and Skalník 1978; Wissenmann-Christie 1986 for a critical overview). In these formulations, long-distance trade is a secondary concern, what happens when control of production breeds acquisitive and socially competitive elites; it is inevitably seen as concentrated on high-value and low-volume goods until some late phase of the evolution of commerce. Complex societies in Maritime Southeast Asia frequently defy these conventions and muddy things even more by relying heavily on mobile, stateless societies for the commodities and connectivity that are key to their international status. The roots of the spice trade, and indeed the trade in most Island Southeast Asian products, trace back to these groups, who nonetheless end up being characterised as marginal and 'left-behind' in conventional historiography (but see Tsing 2005; Dove 2011).

In this chapter we provide a narrative of early Southeast Asian and Indian Ocean trade that takes into account and even prioritises the role of more mobile elements of the complex social landscape of Maritime Southeast Asia. We begin by highlighting the low visibility of Island Southeast Asian state-like polities and mobile societies, both in terms of their relatively scarce archaeological debris and their lack of historical documentation. Such poor visibility is a feature not only of the smaller-scale and less complex social entities that lay at the heart of the region's centrifugal networks, but even of some of the more centralised Island Southeast Asian polities that emerged to dominate key coastlines and alluvial systems. We accordingly consider the nature of the Maritime Southeast Asian 'state' and the ways in which its lower



8.1 Map of Maritime Southeast Asia, showing the key islands of interest, as well as the southern Malay Peninsula, which is linked through much of the past more closely to Maritime Southeast Asian historical trajectories than mainland Southeast Asian ones. We refer to this region interchangeably as Maritime Southeast Asia, Island Southeast Asia and Insular Southeast Asia. It is also known as 'Malesia'.

on-the-ground visibility reflects not only tropical taphonomy, but also a rather distinctive manifestation of complexity. We then explore two less politically 'complex' and more mobile social elements of the Maritime Southeast Asian commercial phenomenon that were fundamental yet are often overlooked – the communities that collected forest and marine produce, and the communities that engaged in the transport of commodities, particularly by maritime routes, locally, regionally and even further afield. We do not offer a comprehensive account of these various communities or indeed Maritime Southeast Asia's position in early processes of globalisation, but instead provide a more nuanced and locally informed account of these processes that suggests a strategy for future research. Fig. 8.1 illustrates the region on which our discussion focuses.

#### THE LOW VISIBILITY OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN SOCIETIES

Notwithstanding the presence of several notable and enduring monumental sites, Maritime Southeast Asian archaeology is in general characterised by low levels of visibility (cf. Junker 2002). This is due in part to the tropical, humid climate, shifting sea levels (many early sites once inhabited are now submerged) and, in some cases, the logistical difficulties of conducting systematic excavations in the region. In an area where tropical timbers, rattans

and bamboos are abundant, typical construction has traditionally drawn almost exclusively upon perishable materials (Reid 1988; Bronson and Wisseman 1978; Hall 2011). The nature of Southeast Asian societies, too, makes it difficult to look for solid evidence. The near absence of vast grasslands precluded subsistence patterns based on domesticated ungulates, and relatively few areas (like parts of Sumatra, Java, Bali, South Sulawesi and Luzon) have supported the intensive wet-rice agriculture or concentrated populations characteristic of many mainland Southeast Asian societies. Instead, a significant proportion of the earliest Southeast Asian societies displayed highly mobile lifestyles, often characterised by swidden cultivation, and amongst a number of groups, such lifeways persisted into historical times. For such societies, the building and moving of houses, or even entire villages, was done in a surprisingly quick and efficient way, as several early European observers have documented (Reid 1988: 62–73). A second key feature of early Maritime Southeast Asia's distinctive materiality is its maritime and riparian component. Much of Maritime Southeast Asia's past took place in the aquatic rather than the terrestrial sphere; river systems are core to island cultural geographies and formed the arteries of upland–coastal trade, while inter-island networks provided access to foodstuffs, material resources, trade commodities and prestige goods.

It should be stressed that low visibility was not a feature only of the earliest and least complex Island Southeast Asian societies. Even more centralised polities in the region have not always been particularly visible in the archaeological record. Bronson and Wisseman (1978: 220) note the 'striking if infrequently noted fact that Malesia – southern or peninsular and Island Southeast Asia – is almost empty of archaeologically locatable cities earlier than the 14th century A.D.'. Some of these have since been located, but the fact remains that these sites have not been easy to find, even when their locations are known. Yet Chinese sources are clear that cities or something very much like them were present in the archipelago from at least the start of the eighth century (Wheatley 1961; Wolters 1967). Part of the explanation surely lies in the form of these population centres – Alfred Russel Wallace describes mid-nineteenth-century Palembang as a populous city several miles long but only one house wide in which dwellings were located on piles over shallow water (cited in Miksic 2004: 240). Bronson and Wisseman (1978) cite some of the other features that likely shaped the low visibility of urban forms in Island Southeast Asia, including their isolation from hinterlands, reliance on trade, and relatively minimal creation of large, durable ceremonial foci. They note that such cities might not sit entirely comfortably in conventional categories, but could nonetheless cover substantial areas and encompass large populations, whilst also fulfilling a wide variety of political and economic functions.

If archaeological sources carry serious limitations, it should be emphasised that textual sources do not greatly assist in addressing the resultant biases. The

earliest historical sources for Maritime Southeast Asia are non-indigenous, and a reliance on Chinese sources in particular persists into later periods. The earliest Insular Southeast Asian written sources – profoundly influenced by Indian traditions – are inscriptional and sporadic, beginning in the fifth century CE (Wisseman-Christie 1995; Miksic 2004; Manguin 2004). Their focus is primarily religious in nature, and information concerning economy, settlements and technology is exceedingly limited. Most of these sources are of little help for the bottom-up approach that we advocate here. Indigenous Southeast Asian literature, whether in Malay, Khmer, Mon or Javanese, typically emanated from the courts or religious centres and was clearly composed to validate those in power. The very word for ‘history’ in Malay, *sejarah*, is derived from the genealogical trees (*shajara*) used in the Islamic World to illustrate the ancestral lineages of political or religious leaders. Most of the available indigenous texts tell the hegemonic and self-glorifying tales of rulers, rarely leaving room for the exploits of those operating outside their direct sphere of influence. Those whose histories lied beyond or between the margins of the states often possess only orally transmitted stories of their pasts.<sup>2</sup> Indian sources are meanwhile concerned chiefly with the extractive possibilities of Maritime Southeast Asia, referring to it as *Suvarnadūpa*, meaning the ‘Islands of Gold’ (e.g. Wolters 1967; Bennett 2009). European colonial sources and accounts on Southeast Asia’s populations contain a different but equally problematic bias. They are, as pointed out by Resink (1968), predominantly occupied with the people with whom colonial officials had dealings.<sup>3</sup> Non-colonised rulers, merchants, slaves, freebooters and semi-sedentary communities thus largely remained outside the European gaze – and colonial archives. In addressing the Sulu area, Warren (1979: 224) asserts that ‘significant among the neglected aspects of its history is a reconstruction of the character of commerce and power. To date the expansion of external trade and the growing incidence of slave raiding in the region ... have claimed the attention of most historians only when those social forces collided with or were affected by European policy’.

Southeast Asian invisibility beyond Southeast Asia, particularly in the wider Indian Ocean world, is influenced by the same dynamics. Textual sources describing Island Southeast Asian merchants, sailors, freebooters and slave-raiders operating in the Indian Ocean are infrequent and incomplete. Although some common loanwords from Malay and other Island Southeast Asian languages spread westwards, they rarely entered the literatures of the Middle East and India, and thus remained largely undocumented and prone to replacement by Arabic, Persian or Hindi vocabulary (Hoogervorst 2013). Only in Madagascar and Mayotte do we find surviving speech communities derived from pre-colonial Maritime Southeast Asians operating in the western Indian Ocean. The Malagasy language unmistakably belongs to the South East Barito language group, whose homeland is in South Borneo (Dahl 1951; Adelaar

2009, 2016). A further string of linguistic evidence points to a considerable quantity of Malay loanwords in all the Malagasy dialects (Adelaar 1989, 2009). Some of these borrowings are ultimately from Sanskrit, implying that the interethnic contact and the resultant migrations from southern Borneo took place at a phase of history in which Malay polities were already intimately connected with India. No unambiguous historical sources have hitherto been found that provide the background for this transoceanic movement.

A new dimension to the narrative of Maritime Southeast Asian populations and their historical presence in the wider Indian Ocean world is added by recent research in human genetics. The first studies of Y-chromosome polymorphisms and mitochondrial sequence diversity have revealed that the population of Madagascar demonstrates African and Southeast Asian ancestry in both its paternal and maternal lineages (e.g. Hurles et al. 2005; Tofanelli et al. 2009). Preliminary molecular genetic studies of Comoros islanders, meanwhile, reveal a relatively small Southeast Asian contribution to maternal ancestry, with East African and Middle Eastern inputs dominating (Gourjon et al. 2011; Msaidie et al. 2011). But other non-Southeast Asian populations in the Indian Ocean world, in as much as they have been documented thus far, display no detectable levels of Southeast Asian genetic admixture, though genomic studies may be more revealing.<sup>4</sup>

#### 'STATES' IN A MARITIME SOUTHEAST ASIAN CONTEXT

The non-visibility of Southeast Asian societies tells us something about patterns of preservation and of scholarly interest, but it also tells us something about Southeast Asia's unique trajectory towards its global *entrepot* status. This included a specific (but as this volume shows, not unique) reliance on its small-scale and stateless social entities, which we address below, as well as a distinctively flexible and non-hierarchical approach to political complexity. Indeed, these two features were mutually reliant. Maritime Southeast Asia's emergence as the source of many things wonderful and valuable in the ancient world was made possible by a particular set of shifting but broadly enduring social and political relationships between coastal polities and the mobile populations of interior rainforests, uplands and the sea.

These relationships probably had their origins in the Neolithic period. Numerous scholars have suggested that early Maritime Southeast Asian society was characterised by economic diversity and significant relations of exchange (Blust 1976; Urry 1981; Bulbeck 2004; Fox and Sather 2006). Archaeological research, while patchy and focused strongly on coastal and/or larger sites, has begun to shed light on this 'economic polymorphism' (Blust 1976: 37; Sather 1995: 253). Bulbeck (2004) has argued for the emergence of trade relationships between coast and hinterland in the Malay Peninsula in the Neolithic period,

for example, suggesting that rainforest hunter-gatherers provided honey, resins and other forest products to coastally oriented groups in exchange for prestige goods. The circulation of Dong Son (*Đồng Sơn*) drums throughout Peninsular Malaysia and Island Southeast Asia suggests the presence of a wealthy elite whose members prospered from interethnic trade, typically maritime, 1,500–2,000 years ago (Bellwood 1997; Bulbeck 2004). Added to the list of sought-after interior products through time were various metals, including tin, gold and iron ore (Bulbeck 2004; Bennett 2009).

By the mid-first millennium CE, we can see a pattern of geographically mobile, maritime-oriented chiefdoms emerging along the coasts of Borneo, Sumatra and the Malay Peninsula. These interlocking, segmentary polities had in common the absence of a centralised, metropolitan capital, the adoption of an Indianised Malay (or Javanese) culture, and a foundation of wealth based on the integration of products from their hinterland – both sylvan and maritime – into global markets, in particular in China and India. Trading with what were probably increasingly specialised (but always flexible) sea- and forest-oriented foragers were well-organised intermediaries with access to more cosmopolitan merchandise, such as metal tools, weapons and decorative items, pottery, beads, glass and textiles. These affluent merchants were able to distribute local produce into wider commercial avenues and assure for it a ready and lucrative market. The increased financial opportunities for brokers and middlemen that were provided by the interlinkage of various small-scale trade systems significantly shaped the early economies of Southeast Asia (see also Lilley, Chapter 12, this volume, on similar developments in Melanesia).

Of these ‘redistributively-based political entities’ (cf. Wheatley 1975: 228), Srivijaya (*Śrivijaya*) was the largest emporium of Maritime Southeast Asia and the first to attract widespread attention from Middle Eastern, Indian and Chinese authors. It was through the activities of this particular political entity that Maritime Southeast Asian commodities reached the Indian Ocean and East Asia on a previously unprecedented scale. While the Isthmus of Kra constituted an earlier nexus in global trade, we can see a gradual shift to the Strait of Malacca starting by the fifth century CE (Wheatley 1961; Wolters 1967). As a natural chokepoint for seaborne travel, this narrow sea lane served as an interregional and translocal nexus between Southeast Asia, China and the Indian Ocean world, where itinerant ships were obliged to await the turning of the monsoon. From the late seventh century, Srivijaya was able to assert control over both sides of the Strait of Malacca and to pull a significant number of scattered coastal polities into its orbit. Chinese texts describe Srivijaya not just as the source of their *materia medica*, but also as a naval power and a transit point for Buddhist monks on their way to India (Wolters 1967). Indeed, its very existence was primarily deduced from careful philological scholarship,

although mounting archaeological evidence has confirmed its proposed geographical location near present-day Palembang (Manguin 1993b).

The difficulties of locating the actual remains of Srivijaya (see, for example, Bronson and Wisseman 1978) in spite of the relatively rich historical descriptions about it highlight not just the kinds of taphonomic issues outlined above, but also some of the idiosyncrasies of the Maritime Southeast Asian ‘state’. Amongst these was a lack of centralisation. Kulke (1993: 176) and Lieberman (2009: 779) contend, for example, that Srivijaya was not as centralised as has been assumed and that its longevity was in fact based rather on remarkably flexible political structures. Militating against Eurocentric notions concerning state formation and its prerequisites, we are presented with a picture of political continuity sustained by organisational fluidity. Rather than states in the conventional sense of the word, the Malay polities might much more accurately be understood as sea-oriented trading centres in which local rulers, itinerant traders, foreign merchants and harbourmasters (*syahbandar*) all played a role. This situation was largely sustained by Southeast Asia’s pre-existing framework of social relationships.<sup>5</sup> While the notion of a maritime state (thalassocracy) is well-ingrained in Southeast Asian historiography (see De Vienne 2012 for a recent example), control of the rivers was equally important. The movement of forest products from the inlands to the coast, whether undertaken by Orang Asli in the Malay Peninsula, Dayaks in Borneo or Malay-speaking upriver communities in Sumatra, was predominantly riverine. Unlike ancient China, India and the Middle East, whose earliest cities served primarily as domestic centres, political centralisation in Maritime Southeast Asia was by default geared towards river or maritime navigation, interethnic trade and international commerce.

Broad-scale political and social organisation in Maritime Southeast Asia was oriented towards the effective exploitation of a range of resources from a variety of ecological settings. The impracticalities of politically subjugating these diverse spheres led to a particular pattern of socio-political complexity in which local elites retained significant power (Wisseman-Christie 1995; Andaya 2008; Hall 2011). Through the support of local leaders, state-level rulers were able to command the loyalty of population centres outside the political core. Some have accordingly characterised Maritime Southeast Asian political organisation as ‘heterarchical’, with horizontally rather than vertically oriented relationships the dominant form (Wolters 1999). However, Island Southeast Asia’s political cultures, many of which focus on hereditary chieftaincy and spiritual power, defy notions of a romanticised non-hierarchy. In recognition of the region’s idiosyncratic pathways towards socio-economic and political centralisation, some writers have also qualified use of the term ‘state’ in reference to the complex societies of early Insular Southeast Asia. Manguin (2004: 307), for example, refers to Srivijaya as a ‘city-state’, while anthropologists sometimes describe early Indonesian and Philippine societies

as ‘segmentary states’, difficult to distinguish from highly developed chiefdoms (cf. Wisseman-Christie 1995: 239–240; Miksic 2004: 239). All of these scholars simultaneously challenge our preconceptions about social complexity, noting the Western cultural prejudices that lead us to expect physically impressive architectural remains and large concentrations of population in urban centres amongst state-level societies (Bronson and Wisseman 1978; Reid 1988; Hall 2011), side-lining political formations in which power and authority were distributed in different ways, to create flexible, enduring exchange networks of extraordinary scale and dynamism.

#### THE ROOTS OF THE TREE OF GLOBALISATION

At the root of these early exchange networks, which eventually made Island Southeast Asia the global spice *entrepôt* par excellence, were the remote upland communities who specialised in acquiring first-hand the products upon which much of the region’s wealth depended. Amongst the most desired products were cloves, nutmeg, sandalwood, benzoin and camphor – all of which fit under the broad ancient category of *species* (Latin for ‘spices’) (Miller 1969). Cloves and nutmeg originate from the Maluku Islands, but their use has become embedded in the cultures of the entire Indian Ocean world as well as lands along the Silk Route. Sandalwood seems to have originated in Timor, while camphor was obtained from Borneo and Sumatra, the latter of which also supplied benzoin. Most of the available information on the pre-modern distribution of these and other spices is derived from Chinese and Indian texts, which suggest their use beyond Southeast Asia, as rare medicinal and religious resources, from the first millennium CE (Donkin 1999, 2003; Zumbroich 2012).

Some earlier export is perhaps suggested by advanced archaeological science techniques. For example, scanning electron microscopy of charcoal remains indicates the presence of sandalwood on India’s Deccan plateau by the end of the second millennium BCE (Asouti and Fuller 2008; Boivin et al. 2008), although it is uncertain whether the tree reached South India through maritime trade or otherwise. Spices from the Indian subcontinent have also been identified in the first and second millennium BCE, and early centuries CE further west (for a review, see Boivin et al. 2014).<sup>6</sup> Tentative clove remains at the Middle Bronze Age site of Terqa (present-day Syria) remain controversial, however (Buccellati and Buccellati 1983: 54), as do both apparent mid-second millennium BCE nutmeg remains from Deir el-Bahari in Egypt (Naville et al. 1913: 18) and organic residues from early first millennium BCE chalices in Israel, possibly indicative of the presence of jasmine or nutmeg (Namdar et al. 2010). The earliest proposed remains of carbonised nutmeg in South Asia are from an Iron Age site associated with 400–300 BCE Northern Black Polished Ware in the Ballia district of eastern Uttar Pradesh (Saraswat et al. 1990: 122–123;

Zumbroich 2012: 55–56) and from a Kushan (*Kuṣāṇa*) fire altar dated to 50–250 CE at Sanghol in the Punjab region (Saraswat and Pokharia 1998; Asouti and Fuller 2008: 117). Archaeological evidence for cloves and nutmeg in Indian regions in more direct contact with Southeast Asia, such as the Coromandel Coast, remains to be established.

While archaeological and historical accounts are largely silent on the actual acquisition of these products, anthropology, ethnohistory and some later historical accounts provide insights (and see also Morrison, Chapter 11, this volume, for a South Asia-based enquiry into similar sources and issues). They suggest that all of these high value plants would have been obtained initially by foragers, and would have required local knowledge of the location and distribution of forest resources – what Lian (1988) refers to as ‘folk ecology’. Detecting or collecting some of the plants or resins seems to have involved a high degree of training. Camphor, for example, formed in the crevices of old trees and historical accounts of its collection describe the challenges involved (see Skeat 1965: 212–214; Donkin 1999: 173–182). Promising trees needed to be located, investigated and then felled, and collection teams were sent out for weeks or months at a time under an experienced leader. Some tribes, like the Punan, were recognised as acknowledged experts in camphor collection, and it was widely believed that unless a special vocabulary was used during collection, and associated rituals and taboos observed, camphor would be difficult or even impossible to find (Donkin 1999: 177). While some Maritime Southeast Asian botanical products continued to be collected by foragers into the European era, others were gradually brought into cultivation. The relationship between spice cultivation and forms of forced or indentured labour was inevitably close, and more so through time. The production of spices in Maluku, for example, increasingly relied on slave labour under the Dutch, in particular in the Banda Archipelago. Slaves or labourers were often culled from the surrounding islands, sometimes from the very same communities that once provided products as more or less free agents as part of more reciprocal exchange systems. Nonetheless, production did not inevitably fall under the sway of centralised and hegemonic agents, and in the colonial period and through to the present day, the smallholder sector of Island Southeast Asian production of forest and botanical commodities for global markets has remained significant (Dove 2011).

Spices were not the only luxury goods obtained from Maritime Southeast Asia. From Borneo and other islands, diamonds, bezoar stones and gold found their ways into transoceanic commercial avenues. The Malay Peninsula and several islands off the Sumatran coast have traditionally provided tin, whereas exotic birds and their colourful feathers were procured from the eastern islands (Swadling 1996; Spyer 2000). Rainforest-dwelling communities from various regions supplied rattans, beeswax and a wide variety of aromatic tree products into recent times, whereas semi-sedentary coastal populations obtained

pearls, tortoise shell, sea weeds, edible holothurians (*trepang*), sharks' fins and birds' nests. The majority of these items were not consumed by the coastal populations whose livelihood depended on collecting them. Instead, they were almost exclusively collected for export to international markets. Several key sea products – *trepang* amongst them – were almost exclusively consumed by the Chinese, for example. So strong was the desire from China for Southeast Asian marine goods that it was able into colonial times to finance small polities – most notably the Sulu Sultanate – and enable a well-organised junk trade, which even European imperialism never completely managed to monopolise (cf. Cushman 1993; Tagliacozzo 2004). Along similar lines, cloves, nutmeg and pepper varieties were almost exclusively harvested for foreigners and were of little use domestically (Dove 2011; Crawfurd 1868). Consequent to these dynamics, the lifestyles of many of Southeast Asia's diverse small-scale communities can be characterised as a fragile equilibrium between their market needs (the collection of economic commodities) and subsistence needs, which have often been met in part, at least for more agriculturally oriented communities, through some form of swidden cultivation (cf. Dove 2011).

The factors that have led to commodities being provided to the global market by local, small-scale societies in Maritime Southeast Asia have not always been addressed. Nonetheless, it is clear that in more recent Southeast Asian history, symbioses of mutual dependency have surfaced in a variety of ways. We may look at the upstream (*hulu*) pepper growers in Sumatra who depended on downstream (*hilir*) courts to distribute their produce (Andaya 1993), the mobile societies inhabiting mainland Southeast Asia's uplands and their intermittent alliances with valley-based settlements (Scott 2009), the urban centres and their relations with the maritime peripheries (Tagliacozzo 2010) and various other examples to see the diverse kinds of relationships that have formed. A key point though is that mobility has been pivotal to the self-determination of local stateless groups. While Southeast Asian polities have often been able to offer such enticements as protection during warfare, agricultural surpluses, technological advances and trade opportunities, they could also overburden, overtax and impose forced labour (Scott 2009). Mobility and distance from state cores, however, ensured that foragers, swidden agriculturalists and sea nomads were traditionally less susceptible to such impositions. They resided in the rugged hills, lagoons and other areas not suitable for cereal agriculture, or accessible by coastal-focused polities, and could easily disappear when under threat of state-induced warfare, epidemics or simply the obligation to pay taxes. The virtual autonomy and semi-sedentary lifestyles of these groups made them difficult to control, due in no small part to the impenetrability of their terrain and near-absence of reliable infrastructure. Entrenched in their own territories, and days' travel from state-controlled regions, many groups, at least in the pre-European era, held substantial sway.

Accordingly, negotiation and enticement were probably preferable options for forest and maritime product-hungry settlements throughout much of Insular Southeast Asian history. Some historical sources suggest that Malay rulers, for example, dispensed titles and gifts upon mobile Orang Asli forager communities, and in return received forest products collected and presented as tribute (Bulbeck 2004; Andaya 2008). The semi-sedentary and sea-oriented Orang Laut received similar rewards and enticements as well as assurances of a reliable market for their products. In return, they provided a range of services to the Malay elite, acting as guides for ships, a major naval force and suppliers of slaves. Orang Laut also engaged in piracy, both at the behest of the Malay ‘state’ and for their own purposes, and Andaya (2008: 190) observes that ‘Orang Laut violence at sea has been termed a legitimate form of Malayan statecraft when it occurs as part of the patron-client arrangement, but as piracy without such legitimisation’. Indeed, the predatory activities of Orang Laut groups and other populations under Malay vassalage were often rewarded through marital bonds and honorary titles if directed against the enemies of their patrons (Andaya 2008; Hoogervorst 2012). Accounts of Maritime Southeast Asian pre-modern history typically pay little attention to these kinds of relationships, and indeed the evidence available to explore them is minimal, at least until more recent times (for which, see, for example, Tagliacozzo 2004; Fox and Sather 2006; Dove 2011).

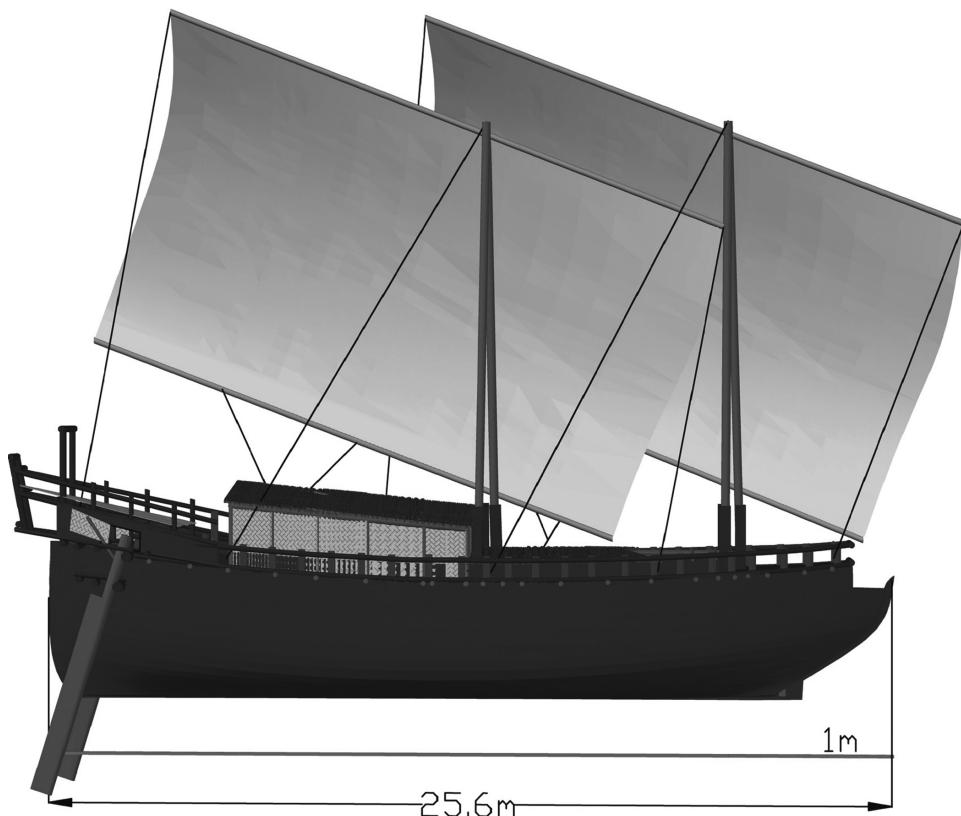
The opportunities for small-scale communities to move in and out of state-level patronage, for economic, political or religious purposes, challenges our notions of ethnicity in pre-modern Southeast Asia. The hegemonic structures and power bases of Srivijaya and other Malay courts enabled them to reward those willing to align with them, and to create formal ties through inter-marriage and the bestowal of titles; the resultant consciousness of belonging to a Malay political and cultural unit was predominantly based on self-identification and could be ‘entered’ (*masuk Melayu*) by people previously regarded as outsiders. From early modern times, the notion of ‘entering’ Malayness typically involved conversion to Islam (as remains the case to the present day), whereas in earlier times the focus may have been on loyalty and allegiance to a ruler, as the contents of the earliest Malay inscriptions seem to suggest. Ethnic identities remained fluid into better-documented times. Thus, a supplier of resinous tree products could adopt a Batak identity in inland North Sumatra, but a Malay one at the nearest coastal town (Andaya 2008: 13). A Sino-Thai merchant, along similar lines, would emphasise his Thai identity in Southeast Asia and his Chinese ancestry in the harbours of China’s southeastern coast (Cushman 1993). Ethnicisation could also be purposefully manipulated, as was done by Bugis merchants who self-identified as Malays in order to claim commercial benefits from the Dutch East India Company (Andaya 2008: 4). Indeed, the adoption of a Malay identity became, to some extent, a catalyst for commercial success.

In other cases, however, the incorporation of communities into the realm of the centralised settlement was not the result of voluntarily acculturation, but of superimposed compulsion, particularly in more recent times as the reach of the state has inevitably expanded. To better control their activities and revenues from maritime resources, Sama-Bajau communities were forcefully subjugated to the Sulu Sultanate (in particular between the mid-eighteenth and mid-nineteenth centuries CE), for example, in which they came to occupy the lowest social niches (Tagliacozzo 2004; Hoogervorst 2012). Defying notions of ‘heterarchy’ discussed earlier, these and several other communities were essentially driven into state dependency, a process known in Malay as *serah*, ‘surrendering’. As pointed out by Adelaar (2016), this word has been borrowed into Malagasy as *sara* ‘a fee’, reflecting the chief consequence of state-incorporation: the obligation to pay tribute to the overlord. Adelaar proposes that the Malagasy, prior to their transoceanic migration, had entered a symbiotic relationship with the state-based Malays of southern Borneo. Such a hypothesis fits well with the general patron-client dynamics outlined in this chapter.

#### SAILORS AND TRADERS IN THE GLOBAL ARENA

In the foregoing discussion, a trend has emerged. We may note tropes of social and ethnic diversity and interdependence, decentralisation, devolution and low archaeological and historical visibility. If these have been critical to revising perceptions of the early and historical ‘state’ in Maritime Southeast Asia, and the relationship of Southeast Asia’s global trade to local communities outside the more concentrated polities of the coast, they are potentially equally relevant to understanding the broader role and perception of Island Southeast Asian shipping, both regionally and further afield.

Nautical skills have shaped the pasts of Maritime Southeast Asian communities since they first settled in the archipelago, long before the arrival of Austronesian speech communities (cf. Mahdi 2016). With tropical forests and water giving shape to much of Southeast Asia’s geography, the key elements for a sophisticated boat-building tradition were in place and indeed abundant from early times. Patterns of archaeological material culture suggest that exchange between islands in the region goes back to Late Pleistocene times at least (Gosden 1992; Irwin 1992; Bulbeck 2004; Denham, Chapter 3, this volume), and that a probably shifting set of inter-island exchange axes and relationships continued through into the late Holocene. These led not just to the movement of material culture but also biological species, styles and ideas (Allen 1996; Heinsohn 2003; Manguin et al. 2011). By the mid-first millennium CE, Southeast Asian societies appear to have developed a rather sophisticated maritime technology. Early Chinese sources describe ‘barbarians’ to the south who possessed huge boats capable of holding many hundreds of



8.2 Reconstruction of a Southeast Asian ship used in long-distance navigation around the tenth century CE (image courtesy of Horst Liebner).

people (Manguin 1993a). The tenth-century Cirebon shipwreck is the best studied example of Southeast Asia's ocean-faring tradition at present (Liebner 2014). While few other large ships have been recovered archaeologically, Manguin (1993a) has argued for the early development of a sophisticated and distinctively Southeast Asian maritime technology, featuring stitched planks and lashed lugs, on the basis of the available, albeit limited, sources of archaeological and historical evidence. He argues that given the level of sophistication, and the extraordinary size of the early Southeast Asian ships described in Chinese sources, advanced maritime technology must have been present by the third century CE. Fig. 8.2 presents a reconstruction of one of these early ocean-going ships.

First-millennium Maritime Southeast Asian-driven voyages into the South China Sea were preceded by a set of exchanges across the Bay of Bengal that led to the arrival of Indian ceramics, beads and crops in the broader Southeast Asian region beginning by the mid-first millennium BCE (Ardika and Bellwood 1991; Bellina 2007). The role of Southeast Asian ships, and indeed those of any particular region, in this trade has not been elucidated clearly.

Given the restrictions of available empirical datasets, the Southeast Asian role in shipping for international trade is understandably hazy, though there are a few suggestive historical sources. Early Chinese sources describe the southern Kunlun people, thought to be Southeast Asians, as barbarians who were nonetheless relied upon to provide sea transport and trade goods (Ferrand 1919; Pelliot 1925; Wolters 1967). From 132 CE, the Chinese literature contains references to envoys from different Southeast Asian kingdoms sent to the Chinese emperor (Pelliot 1904: 366; Ferrand 1919: (14), 5–6; Wolters 1967). Already in the third century CE, Chinese accounts elaborate on the vessels that enabled such diplomatic journeys, describing in detail the large sailing ships built in the Southeast Asian fashion (Manguin 1993a, 2012). It should be pointed out here that by this time, overseas goods could only enter China legally under the guise of tributary missions. Needless to say, Southeast Asian rulers understood well the economic and occasionally military benefits of gaining the favour of the Chinese emperors by recognising them as their overlords (Andaya and Andaya 2001: 25; Lieberman 2009: 778). But Insular Southeast Asian sailors also operated beyond the constraints of tributary missions. Wolters (1967: 139–158) has argued convincingly that the shippers of so-called ‘Persian’ (*Bōsi*) cargoes referred to in Chinese sources in the fifth to sixth century were for the most part Indonesians. Their ships, he points out, were probably also sailing to India and Sri Lanka in this period (see also Manguin 1993a, 2010). In the seventh century, the Chinese pilgrim I Tsing (*Yījīng*) travelled from Southeast to India on a ship sent by the ruler of Srivijaya (Wolters 1967: 153), and other Buddhist monks travelled on Southeast Asian ships across the South China Sea and Bay of Bengal in this period (Manguin 2012).

In order to understand Maritime Southeast Asian agency in the wider Indian Ocean world, some scholars have looked to medieval Islamic references suggestive of their presence in East Africa (Ferrand 1910; Allibert 1999). Of interest have been descriptions of the *Wāqūqāq*, believed to have come either from the far south of the Indian Ocean or the Far East, and who engaged in slave-raiding and trading on the East African coast. The Persian geographer Bozorg bin Shahriyar, for example, describes in the early tenth century how they came to acquire tortoiseshell, ivory and slaves for the ‘China trade’ (Ferrand 1907: 462–463). In this light, we may also re-examine a Chinese account dated to 813, which documents the shipment of *Sēngqí* (i.e. Zanjī or East African) slaves from Java to China (Pelliot 1904: 289–291; Jákl 2017). Portuguese sources provide an important insight into later Southeast Asian presence in the Indian Ocean. They describe ‘Javanese’ (possibly generic Insular Southeast Asian) voyages to Madagascar (Ferrand 1910; Manguin 2010), suggesting a degree of ongoing contact between the regions into the Age of Discovery. The Maldives, where the Portuguese also encountered Island Southeast Asian ships, may have been used as stepping stones in reaching Madagascar and other parts of the Indian

Ocean (Manguin 2010; Hoogervorst 2012: 36–38), although there is no evidence of Southeast Asian genetic admixture there (Pijpe et al. 2013). Large ocean-going junks, built in the Southeast Asian fashion, are documented ubiquitously in the Indian Ocean when European sailors first entered its waters (Van Leur 1934; Manguin 1993c). By the end of the sixteenth century, however, Portuguese and Dutch sources reveal a rapid decline in Island Southeast Asian shipping activities, due perhaps to competition from affluent and well-organised Gujarati and Chinese trading fleets; even before the Dutch maritime hegemony had taken definite shape in Island Southeast Asia, indigenous seafaring had decreased significantly, and was reduced to a predominantly local level (Manguin 1993c).

If Southeast Asian exploits in the wider Indian Ocean are evidently indicated over a long time span by historical sources, we might ask where their legacy lies, in terms of material culture, linguistic, genetic and cultural evidence. The obvious answer is Madagascar, where evidence from each of these fields clearly point to a Southeast Asian colonisation, probably by the eighth century CE (cf. Dahl 1951; Adelaar 2009; Blench 2010).<sup>7</sup> Manguin (2010) has emphasised the need to understand this colonisation within the context not of earlier Austronesian migrations that led to the peopling of the Pacific, but as part of a broader pattern of later, active Southeast Asian voyaging and trade in the Indian Ocean. The introduction of a suite of Southeast Asian plants as well as Southeast Asian agricultural, iron-production and textile technologies (Radimilahy 1988; Beaujard 2011; Boivin et al. 2013) in Madagascar supports the notion of something more organised and enduring than is implied by increasingly questionable models of accidental or outrigger canoe-driven colonisation (e.g. Cox et al. 2012).

But beyond Madagascar, the evidence is minimal. A Southeast Asian provenance of certain Indian Ocean pottery types has been proposed (Solheim and Deraniyagala 1972; Allibert 2008; Selvakumar 2011), but these are inevitably controversial. The bronze bowls with a high tin content found in South Indian and Sri Lankan sites have also been connected to Southeast Asia (Ray 1994: 103; Rajan 2011: 188–190). While the high tin bronze-working tradition appears to be of Indian origin (Srinivasan and Glover 1997), the tin was presumably imported from the Malay Peninsula, which has the largest tin fields in the world. Further, several plants and animals that became widespread in the Indian Ocean world have their origins in Southeast Asia (e.g. Boivin et al. 2013; Hoogervorst 2013). These transmissions do not prove the presence of Southeast Asian agency; they only demonstrate Indian Ocean trade. More compelling is the distribution of Southeast Asian maritime technologies across the Indian Ocean. The nautical elements now prevalent in the more southerly regions of the Indian Ocean, generally thought to have been adopted as a result of contact with Insular Southeast Asian sailors and

shipwrights, include lashed-lug patterns of plank-fastening, certain types of spritsails and the outrigger device (cf. Brindley 1932; Hornell 1944; Mahdi 1999; Manguin 2010; Selvakumar 2011; Hoogervorst 2013).

There are a variety of reasons why the Southeast Asian presence in the Indian Ocean might be very real but far from apparent. The key one is that Southeast Asians did not leave us with the abundant textual records of other societies, like the Chinese, the Indians and the Arabs. They were not big powerful states with major domestic markets like India or China. On archaeological sites around the Indian Ocean rim, their contribution appears minimal, their primary and most widely distributed trading products being highly degradable vegetal and marine products, and perhaps easily meltable metals. The sturdy Chinese and Arab ceramics that have made their way to nearly every port on the Indian Ocean rim by the first millennium CE bring these societies to the foreground in a way that Southeast Asia can only envy. Chinese pottery is everywhere, yet all available evidence suggests minimal Chinese maritime activity until the ninth to tenth century CE (Manguin 1993a; Heng 2009). In addition, Southeast Asian ships likely dominated trade routes across the more southerly parts of the Indian Ocean, such as the Maldives and Madagascar, which lay well outside any historical tradition (Manguin 2010).

Southeast Asians may also, at least in certain times and contexts, have played a primarily supportive role in Indian Ocean transport. In this vein, Wolters (1967: 154) argues that the Indonesian contribution, at least in the first millennium, ‘should not be exaggerated’, and should be understood in particular in terms of the supply of transport for merchants and cargoes from the broader maritime Asian region. He points out that foreigners – whether Indians, Persians or Chinese – may have chartered ships manufactured and manned by Southeast Asians. Such a practice was documented for the Southeast Asian kingdom of Funan, where ships were typically rented out by their owners (Pelliot 1925: 254). However, the financing, building and sailing of the large Southeast Asian vessels attested in the Chinese literature, and to some extent in the archaeological record, suggests the involvement of state-like polities in later centuries. It seems likely that Southeast Asian crews included members of groups like the Orang Laut, mobile and definitively non-state societies whose services were nonetheless critical to seafaring expeditions (cf. Ferrand 1919; Wolters 1967: 252; Mahdi 2016). In this multi-ethnic mélange, where more mobile elements of society, and more mobile societies in general, entered into a variety of relationships with the more sedentary agents of Indian Ocean globalisation, we might expect a Southeast Asian contribution to take a variety of forms.

In a broader Indian Ocean context, it is also worth noting that a wholesale assimilation of Malay-speaking groups into numerically superior Swahili, Tamil or Sinhalese populations, among others, would be difficult to trace

genetically, and potentially linguistically and culturally as well. It is not known whether Maritime Southeast Asian traders commonly took wives from outside their communities, as was prevalent in the case of more recent interactions between Makasar people from Sulawesi and aboriginal populations in northern Australia (Clark and May 2013). As has been pointed out previously, the Maritime Southeast Asian element in the ancestry of Comorian populations is considerably smaller than the Middle Eastern element, and predominantly centred on female lineages. Whether this ancestry derives from direct Southeast Asian arrivals to the islands, or was mediated via interaction with, and colonisation from, Madagascar remains unclear.

The social status of Southeast Asian communities may be key to understanding their subsequent decline in the western parts of the Indian Ocean. Linguistic lines of evidence suggest a relatively lower perceived status of Southeast Asian traders compared to cosmopolitan merchants from bigger, more self-sufficient states in the Middle East and South Asia. The lexical component from Malay and other Southeast Asian languages to other speech communities of the Indian Ocean is limited in comparison to Arabic, Persian or North Indian introductions. While Malay was the spoken and written language of Srivijaya and other Malay polities, its socio-linguistic prestige had never reached far beyond Maritime Southeast Asia, again with the possible exception of Madagascar. Due in part to the inescapable necessity of accommodating trade with speech communities further afield, Malay gradually developed into a regional *lingua franca* displaying a remarkable susceptibility to foreign loanwords, including from Sanskrit, Tamil, Persian, Arabic, North Indian and southern Chinese languages (cf. Jones 2007). Conversely, Sanskrit and Arabic – as conveyors of religious thought – were universally regarded as prestigious languages, in the Malay speech area but also in other regions of the Indian Ocean. Hence, borrowing from these sources, even for concepts for which perfectly suitable indigenous words were available, was seen as an enrichment of the recipient language. As a result of the low status of Malay *vis-à-vis* the high status of Sanskrit, several Southeast Asian products were dispersed across the Indian Ocean under their Sanskrit names (Hoogervorst 2013).

Malay loanwords in the wider Indian Ocean world were dominated by the same principles. While Hoogervorst (2013) lists numerous Malay loanwords into late Sanskrit, Tamil, Hindi and other languages, the study also makes clear that speech communities often avoided having to borrow from Malay and other low-status languages. Even for commodities from Southeast Asia that were distributed by Malay-speaking merchants, high-status languages such as Arabic and Sanskrit preferred indigenous terms, either in the form of neologisms of a descriptive character or existing words through semantic extension. The latter option was especially common for introduced plants with indigenous lookalikes or related species in the ecologies of the recipient

speech communities. Thus, for Southeast Asian taro or yam varieties, people would typically use an existing term denoting a familiar tuber over a loan-word, whereas names for local ensets or other fruits could easily be extended to introduced banana cultivars. A more sophisticated way of masquerading foreign loanwords was through the linguistic process of back-formation. This was especially common for Indic languages with puristic pretensions, such as Sanskrit. Foreign loanwords into Sanskrit, e.g. from Persian, Malay or Dravidian sources, were often seen as corruptions and hence artificially adjusted to resemble inherited vocabulary. Some examples of ‘masqueraded loans’ are given in Hoogervorst (2013, 2017).

#### CONCLUDING REMARKS

The historical spice trade has inevitably been seen through European eyes, while understandings of the emergence of complexity and trade in early Island Southeast Asia have been filtered through Western or at best Indian notions of statehood. None of these have done justice to the agency of everyday Southeast Asians, those who collected commodities from forests and seas, crewed and piloted ships and made possible an extraordinary web of connections in which islands remote from the centres of global population, agriculture and ‘civilisation’ became the nexus of a trade so expansive it would eventually, by the colonial period, topple over into the truly global. We have, accordingly, explored Island Southeast Asia’s dynamics of entanglement with the wider world through a focus not on what happened, but on *how* it happened, and in particular *who* was involved. The resultant narrative moves beyond state-centred and settled societies and embraces an appreciation of more mobile lifestyles, in particular those of semi-sedentary communities operating on the production end of global systems and of skilled seafarers enabling the maritime distribution of products, processes and people, on a local scale as well as further afield. These developments took shape against the backdrop of advances in shipping technology, increased contacts with India and China, and the beginnings of statehood in Insular Southeast Asia – itself a process that is not satisfactorily explained through conventional analytical paradigms. It is becoming increasingly clear that the region’s more mobile segments featured not just as the suppliers of global merchandise, but also as independent agents able to (re)negotiate their functions and enhance their positions in synergy with larger political units. Southeast Asia’s early coastal polities, too, were more than conveniently situated trading posts; a sophisticated seafaring and ship-building tradition enabled their active involvement in the dispersal and redistribution of commodities, whether from their remote hinterlands or cosmopolitan trading partners.

Island Southeast Asia has a key role to play in recognising Wolf’s ‘people without history’. Yet Wolf himself had little to say about Island Southeast Asia,

seeing the region mainly as ‘one of the points of intersection of the Indian and Chinese cultural spheres’ (1997: 56) to which his attention was primarily drawn. He had even less to say about the more mobile elements of Island Southeast Asian society, mentioning only the ‘tribal’ slash-and-burn farmers who provided crops to settled centres, with no indication of their potential importance to the global spice trade. Merchants were ‘mostly foreigners’ (1997: 57) and amongst the many groups involved in shipping, Southeast Asians were not listed. Yet Wolf’s summary, the product of research in the 1970s, derives from an older view of Island Southeast Asia, one that is gradually being supplanted by new studies that recognise not just Southeast Asian agency, but the extension of that agency to a diverse array of cultural, social and ethnic groups. Such studies actively address the challenge of recognising the interconnectedness of Southeast Asia ‘without losing the Southeast Asians from the centre of their own historical stage’ (Reid 1988: xiii). Here we have attempted to add to this reorientation by drawing into particular relief the contributions of people who once seemed without history, but who we increasingly recognise as *central to* history, and particularly the history of an increasingly globalising set of trade connections that came to link camphor collectors in remote Borneo, spice cultivators in Maluku, ‘sea people’ in the Sulu area and intermediaries from various Malay trading posts to market traders and consumers from China to Europe.

The connections and agents of Island Southeast Asia’s internationally networked past challenge us to rethink our ideas about globalisation, in both its ancient and modern manifestations. Traditional notions of the agents of early globalisation are nicely summed up in the following quote, from the introduction to a recent volume on *Globalization in World History*:

Before the modern era ... globalizing networks were created by great kings and warriors searching for wealth and honour in fabulous lands, by religious wanderers and pilgrims seeking traces of God in distant realms, and by merchant princes and venturers seeking profit amidst risk across borders and continents. At a more mundane level, consumers prized exotic medicinal herbs and precious goods and tokens that they hoped would bring them health and fortune. All this powered archaic globalization. (Hopkins 2002: 4)

Ancient globalisation in this view is about the desires of great men and elites, who take on the driving role played by politicians and multinational corporations today. If less traditional early agents are considered at all, it is usually through the lens of World Systems and Neo-Marxist tropes of centrism, dependency, coercion and exploitation. But the logic of globalisation, both past and present, prioritises movement, mobility and the formation of linkages between not just geographically but socially and politically distant groups of people, urging us to pay more attention to the agents facilitating these social

events. The mistake of some perspectives on globalisation has been to see these linkages as purely hegemonic and destructive of difference (e.g. Ritzer 2004). Yet diversity is a key element of globalisation (e.g. Appadurai 1996 and papers in Ritzer 2007), and is less a reflection of the limitations of its forces than the way that globalisation, both past and present, supersedes state entities to form alternative kinds of relationships. These can be relationships of dependency and authority, but they can equally well be, and often were in pre-modern Maritime Southeast Asia, relationships that gave space for the agency of groups of people we often see as subsumed by globalisation. The role of non-elite agents, and the ways that globalisation has shaped relationships between local and global, sedentary and mobile, and state and non-state deserve greater acknowledgement and exploration.

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#### NOTES

1. We are indebted to Ian Caldwell, Michael Frachetti, and an anonymous reviewer for their valuable comments on an earlier version of this chapter.
2. The interpretation of oral histories suffers from considerable methodological issues and from the co-existence of diverging versions, which, in the case of Southeast Asia, were often first put on paper by Europeans in colonial times. Scott (2009) contends that the maintenance of a largely oral culture is deliberate and allows small-scale societies to reinvent their histories and genealogies as a means to adapt to changing power relations.
3. The first scholar to introduce a Southeast Asia-centric perspective was Van Leur (1934) in a remarkably progressive monograph on pre-modern Asian trade, which, however, suffered from the same informational lacunae that continue to plague contemporary scholarship on this topic. How can we construct a history when textual sources are lacking, biased or ambiguous?
4. Some Southeast Asian ancestral affinities to the Andaman Islanders have been proposed by Chaubey and Endicott (2013), but the historical scenario of interethnic contact remains unclear. See Bulbeck (2004: 323–325) on some possible historical connections and Hoogervorst (2013) for examples of language contact between Maritime Southeast Asia and the Andaman and Nicobar Islands.
5. Along similar lines, European colonisation also greatly benefited from the existing political and commercial infrastructures in Maritime Southeast Asia. See Morrison (Chapter 11, this volume) on the same phenomenon in South Asia.
6. Black pepper from the Malabar Coast has been discovered in the nostril of a late second millennium BCE mummy in Egypt (Plu 1985; Boivin and Fuller 2009; Fuller et al. 2011). Residue studies are beginning to shed further light: cinnamaldehyde indicates the possible presence of cinnamon, from South Asia, in eleventh–ninth-century BCE ceramic flasks in the Levant (Namdar et al. 2013), for example.
7. Whether Madagascar was already inhabited by African foragers prior to the arrival of Austronesian speech communities is presently a source of debate (see Dewar et al. 2013).

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